**Allan R. Millett, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951: They Came from the North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010)**

**Introduction**

Critical of 1990s Cold War historians paying so little attention of Korean War = stresses in 1980s finally shed ‘forgotten status’

Critical of accepted interpretation of Korean War as an interstate conflict definite by outside intervention = relies on Truman administration’s justification for intervention

Critical of failure of US politicians and military to study Korea as ‘war of national liberation’ and civil war = very little consideration of role of Korean Military Advisory Group

Millett former US Marine = military aspects his specialism

“I propose that the Korean War is an example of the one great lesson of twentieth-century warfare: that no conflict should be categorized as simply an interstate war or civil war or even a limited insurgency...Understanding the Korean War will provide even more relevant examples of a war that embodies almost every aspect of contemporary conflict.” (6)

Critical of non-Korean historians for ‘historical deprivation’ (7) and ‘tendency to see the Koreans as helpless pawns’ (8)

“The essential intellectual foundation of this book is that the Korean War, known in the West as the war of 1950-1953, was simply the most violent stage of a struggle between two competing visions of a modern, authentic Korean nation...In Korea, however, the two revolutionary movements remained in equilibrium, reinforced by the US-USSR occupations of 1945-1948 and the support of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea from Communist China and the Soviet Union and the support of the Republic of Korea from Japan, the United States, and Nationalist China.’ (10-11)

‘The most appropriate way to understand the Korean War is to view it as a Maoist people’s war, the socialist global template for war of national liberation and postcolonial succession’.

Phase One = 1945-48 organisation and political agitation

Phase Two = April 1948-June 1950 Communist insurrection in South Korea, ‘unknown war’, ROK victory

Phase Three = shift to conventional warfare by NK

“In Maoist terms the North Koreans had made an unsuccessful transition to Phase Three conventional warfare but had been replaced by the Chinese as the Phase Three army. The Chinese had also failed to complete Phase Three with the defeat of the United Nations Command.” (13)

“The 1950-1951 Korean War, often characterized as ‘the war of maneuver’, is the aborted Phase Three of an insurgency, transformed into a conventional war of ‘liberation’ or ‘aggression’. The counterrevolutionary United Nations Command offensive of October-November 1950 had simply forced the DPRK’s nearest patron to rescue the revolutionary strategy. That is the subject of this book.”

Critical of interpretation of ‘stalemated’ war = stresses still much serious fighting

Critical of view fighting prolonged by US stand on POWs = US desired peace for domestic and international reasons while Communists all advantages by continued fighting; war ended by Communists who no longer saw advantages

“Those who claim that the Korean war served as a surrogate World War III should take another sip of *soju*”. (16) = clear attack on Stueck

“If my understanding of the Korean War is more complex than the conventional narrative created by American diplomatic and military historians, those insights come, first, from archival research (never complete) and the work of specialized, linguistically gifted historians who are Koreans, Chinese, Russians, British, and a small squad of American historians of Korea and Korean-American relations.” (17)

“I do not believe that any of us would argue that the Korean War is the most important crisis of the Cold War, not even for its effect on American foreign policy. I believe we would all agree, however, that the Korean War is at least the most important formative event in shaping American relations with postwar Japan and the People’s Republic of China, both consequential for twenty-first-century American.” (17)

“I am acutely aware of this book’s shortcomings, and I am more convinced than ever that major international wars – for such many civil wars become – deserve to be reconstructed by a team of historians representing all the belligerents.” (17)

“I have not written about the Korean War for those who fought it, but for those who hope to ensure that it will never happen again.” (17)

**Prologue**

Much emphasis on KMAG = prewar focus on training ROKA, not anticipating NK invasion

Clear focus on experience of individual soldiers, journalists, politicians, diplomats, etc

Much emphasis on UNCOK and role of military observers = clear conclusion that ROKA holding defensive positions prior to NK invasion

**Chapter One**

“With the exhaustion of every instrument of politics short of conventional war, the governments of the two Koreas turned to their armies to preserve their own republics and destroy their rival regime.” (29) = details on military build-up

Stresses Koreans and US personnel (detailed biographies) in Seoul foresaw conflict at some point but intelligence failures in Tokyo (Willoughby) = detailed and interesting new viewpoint on question that is usually taken for granted

Short section on NK decision for war = good but nothing particularly new

“The road to war started in Pyongyang, but ran through Moscow and Beijing before it reached Seoul.” (45)

**Chapter Two**

Background on Truman and MacArthur’s contrasting paths to power and recent Cold War experiences; biographies of Department of Defense personnel, including Johnson and JCS; biographies on Department of State personnel, including Acheson, Rusk, Nitze; detailed biographies of staff in Tokyo, including MacArthur, Almond, Walker, Stratemeyer, Joy

Central focus on debate between Defense and State on defense policy/rearmament prior to Korea (leading to NSC 68) = very detailed but nothing groundbreaking

“The American forces available to Douglas MacArthur in case of war had enough fighting power to wage war – but only against the Soviet Union” (75) = very detailed analysis of why US forces FE not combat ready but nothing groundbreaking

**Chapter Three**

“In the early hours of June 25, 190, elements of seven North Korean divisions cross the Thirty-eighth Parallel and changed the Korean War into an international struggle with global consequences” (85) = central theme of trilogy

Detailed account of first week of fighting (focus on ROK perspective = stresses both mistakes, especially Rhee and other leaders, and bravery of many ROK soldiers)

And US decision to intervene (and through UN) = stresses confusion in Korea as KMAG no plans except evacuation; stresses MacArthur immediately viewed in ‘geostrategic’ terms and acted without authorisation

**Chapter Four**

Critical of NK invasion despite early successes = expected SK collapse that never came; ill-prepared for long campaign; had to delay offensive to bring in supplies and recruits

Focus on events in Washington = “The State Department quickly took the lead in dealing with the Korean crisis” (110) but Defense, Tokyo, UN all involved, and Truman decisive action (esp. compared to MacArthur), stresses ad hoc and often chaotic nature of response; highlights administration’s struggle to communicate with people through press

Repeatedly argues that intervention through UN widely popular in administration and Congress

Emphasis on growing friction between Tokyo and Washington as MacArthur pushed for ground forces while NSC considering global threats

Emphasis on early use of USAF and why struggled to make impact except in defeating NKAF = needed ground forces but only immediately available were ROK (stresses friction with US, mistakes, bravery, some successes ROKAF)

Detailed account of first US ground forces (Task Force Smith) with KPA 5 July and successive defeats

“However disappointing the combat on the ground and air, the United States had drawn a line in the rice fields”. (143)

**Chapter Five**

“In the summer of 1950 the president enjoyed the support of a staff of loyal, intelligent, dedicated, Washington-smart men who had expertise in waging any war” = emphasis on experience of Acheson and JCS (not Johnson)

Stresses doubts held by Stalin, Mao and Kim about success of NK invasion as early as July-Aug = Stalin pressing for Mao commitment

NK sought quick victory = detailed account of Battle of Taejeon 5-15 July (good maps)

Does not blame GIs = “The same GIs fought with distinction from September 1950 until October 1951 when the war moved away from its maneuver phase. The problems began in the Far East Command itself, at least its army contingent, since less than half the soldiers in MacArthur’s theatre were assigned to the Eighth Army’s four divisions.” (154)

Emphasis on recovery and fighting spirit of ROKA despite friction with Eighth Army and Rhee’s unpredictability = also SK militias, labour, etc crucial

On atrocities: “Neither the DPRK not the ROK erred on the side of humanity, but the United States and the UN mission restrained their vengeful pupils if possible, and the Soviet Union would not” = considerable detail on incidents in early war

Much detail on logistics of supplying US/UN forces through Japan to Pusan = stresses both successes and failures, ad hoc nature

Emphasis on leading role of MacArthur in forming strategy = Truman unwilling to challenge even though distrusted, JCS eventually backed down over Inchon

Emphasis on steadily improving ground, air and sea forces and intelligence although still many problems = all necessary to prevent Soviet intervention and allow for Inchon

**Chapter Six**

Initial focus on use of air and naval power to bolster ground forces and buy time = considerable attention paid to Royal Navy, stresses NK under pressure bring about swift victory, US forces still forced to retreat mid-July (much detail), much focus on ROKA

“The battle of Taejon (5-15 July) marked the high point of the KPA’s battlefield dominance” (193) = stresses not immediately apparent but lessons there to be learned

Stresses difficult position of Walker since limited military capability, rivalry with Almond and MacArthur ignored, especially when talking to press = “many enemies” (200)

Emphasis on MacArthur’s impatience with military situation since completely dedicated to Inchon landings

“At the heart of Washington’s concern over the conduct of the Korean War remained the hard realities of emergency mobilization” (204) = continuing debate on rearmament between Johnson vs. Acheson/JCS

Long section on UN forces = considered desirable but logistical/practical problems; political and military factors prevented rapid arrival UN troops

“Seldom in the history of warfare have so few gone so far so slowly – and with good cause” (206) = particular problems with Britain, most vocal critic as well as closest ally

Long section contrasting MacArthur’s personal aura and power over decision launch Inchon and controversy with allies, particularly British, and with Truman administration (visit to Taiwan, letter to Veterans of Foreign Wars)

Detailed account of battlefield during defence of Pusan Perimeter = emphasis on close coordination and success of US ground, air and naval forces and ROKA but still problems; account of NK’s final offensive to try to force victory

**Bibliographical Essay**

Very detailed and useful resource for any historian of Korean War

Very negative picture of role of Rhee although limited influence during crisis period

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THE WAR FOR KOREA, 1950-1951: They Came from the North, Allan R. Millett, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 20 1 0, 644 pages, $45.00

When most Americans think of the Korean War (that is, when they remember the so-called "forgotten war"), they think of June 1950 to July 1951 (the North Korean invasion to the allied restoration of the 38th parallel), which make up the two years of battlefield stalemate that lasted until 1953. This is the focus of Allan Millett's second volume in a projected trilogy on the Korean conflict.

Volume One, published in 2005, is about the almost completely forgotten part of the forgotten war, the Korean civil war pitting pro- versus anti-communist factions headquartered, respectively, in Pyongyang and Seoul. Volume Three, scheduled for publication in late 2012, will cover the conclusion of the conflict: deadly small unit "king of the mountain" combat (the communists take Pork Chop Hill at night; the United States/United Nations/South Korean coalition takes it back in the morning) and prolonged negotiations, primarily over the voluntary repatriation of POWs. If the third volume matches the first two, Millett will produce for the Korean War something equivalent to Rick Atkinson's trilogy on the U.S. Army in World War II Europe and Douglas Southall Freeman's trilogy on the Army of Northern Virginia in the U.S. Civil War.

Most books about the Korean War fall into one of two broad categories. On the one hand, there are stories of personal courage, cowardice, insight, and arrogance. Among the best are Joseph Goulden's Korea: The Untold Story (1982), Clay Blair's The Forgotten War (1987), Max Hasting's The Korean War (1987), John Toland's In Mortal Combat (1991), and David Halberstam's The Coldest Winter (2007). On the other hand, there are the workman-like studies coming out of the military service history offices: Roy Appleman's South to the Naktong, North to the YaIu (1961), Robert Futrell's The United States Air Force in Korea (1983), and James Field's History of United States Naval Operations: Korea (1962).

The popular histories are long on style but thin on data, while the service histories often read like telephone books. Millett stands out from either pack. His research is comprehensive, on par with Appleman. Yet, Millett wraps the facts he uncovers in a narrative worthy of Halberstam. "The old soldier," he says of MacArthur, after dismissal by the president, "faded away on the speech circuit in the summer of 1 95 1 and took up permanent residence in New York City to write his memoirs and rail about his misfortune, a King Lear wrapped in his varsity ?' bathrobe and his selective memoirs." Ouch!

No history written by mortals is ever definitive. There are hundreds of Korean War documents still classified in the National Archives, not to mention thousands retained by the CIA. This means that Millett will not be the final word on all aspects of the Korean War. However, it's safe to say that when the last volume of the trilogy is in, Millett's will stand out as the most authoritative.

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**James Matray review, Allan Millet, *The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2005)**

Looking at origins of war = claim that conflict began April 1948 with Communist insurrection on Jeju-do; looks at both civil and international origins; good focus on events in South Korea (role of politicians, army and police); fails to look in detail at US ‘mistakes’ and too sympathetic towards many South Koreans; good maps, images and bibliographical essay; over-reliance US and SK military records and perspectives